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Book Reviews

Ancient Gems in Modern Settings. Being Versions of the Greek Anthology in English Rhyme by Various Writers. Edited by G. B. Grundy. Oxford: B. H. Blackwell, 1913.

The Greek epigram is a constant lure to the versifier, less often to the poet. The simple dignity and directness of early epigram baffle the translator; the "modern setting" is apt to be tawdry, and the "ancient gem" becomes mere gaud. To one who knows the Greek, the jingle of English rhyme is offensive, though necessary to the enjoyment of the English reader, and perhaps fairly matched by the abundant assonance at least of later epigrams. When "Cyrene" must rhyme with "mean ye," and "high rate" with "pirate," one naturally prefers the rhymeless original. Mr. Grundy, however, has succeeded in bringing together translations of a fairly even degree of merit, better than the collection by Tomson in 1889 and more representative of the best epigrams in the anthology and of the best translators. Real distinction in style is rare; Symonds and Lang approach it occasionally; of those who have attempted much, J. A. Potts is more evenly excellent than the others.

Editors of anthologies never expect praise; they must select, and under the limitations of copyright and of the favor of individual translators; nor can they hope that their taste in selection will agree with that of many readers. The reviewer becomes querulous when he finds Theocritus represented by one epigram as against twenty epigrams of Leonidas; Phillimore's translations in the *Dublin Review* and Paton's in his *Erotica*, though both these translators are hardly more than poetasters, might have been drawn upon to enlarge the contribution from the Hellenistic period. One misses Edmund Gosse's "After many a dusty mile," and wonders if the English editor might not have made a place for a few American versions, those for example of Lilla Cabot Perry. The editor is quite within his rights in including so large a number of his own translations, to which he modestly refers in his preface; his jocose Muse is fairly successful in the translation of Nicarchus' difficult ascent to the heavenly home of Demetrius in a six-story flat-building; nor are his versions of less flippant epigrams fairly represented by the dreadful lapse in Ben Jonson's lyric:

I am not fond of wine, dear, but if you'd have me sip
The flowing bowl too often, just touch it with your lip.
For if you touch it thus, love, sobriety's all up;
How can a man resist so sweet a bearer of the cup?

Mr. Grundy runs a bit to commonplaces like "the flowing bowl," but it is not often that his poetic taste is "all up."

H. W. P.